



## Trees can benefit your children too!

- 1) **Imaginative unconstrained play**
- 2) **Building self esteem and confidence**
- 3) **Developing outdoor skills**
- 4) **Learning about wildlife and the environment**

### 1) Imaginative unconstrained play

**Woodlands provide freedom for children to learn and play.**

The culture of childhood has changed to one that is primarily supervised and indoors. For example nowadays only 10% of children play in the natural environment compared to 40% of adults when they were young.<sup>1</sup>

Woods can be used for formal educational activities such as through forest schools who provide opportunities for everyone, from very young children to adults to learn in the woods.

Woods also offer limitless opportunities for imaginative play, both within and outside school. This unstructured approach to play enables children to develop their problem solving abilities and their ability to assess risks and danger.<sup>2</sup>

### 2) Building self esteem and confidence<sup>3</sup>

From climbing trees to making collages out of leaves woods allow children to be themselves and explore their own little piece of the world.

*“Look deep, deep, deep into nature,  
and then you will understand  
everything”*

Albert Einstein



### The Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard aspires<sup>4</sup>:

- i. That no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size.
- ii. That there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round trip) of people's homes

Figure 1

Research shows that that being in a forest improves children's moods but that this improvement is greatest in children suffering from a 'mental disorder.'<sup>5</sup>

### 3) Develop outdoor skills

Adults and children can learn practical and fun skills such as wood carving, orienteering and team building.

### 4) Learn about wildlife and the environment

Woodland provides an opportunity to learn about nature and develop an understanding of the importance of leading more environmentally friendly lifestyles. It also puts lessons from the classroom into a practical context, seeing science and nature in reality.

Research shows that childhood experiences of nature can shape their connectivity with the environment as an adult<sup>6</sup>.

### How can planting trees help?

One of the primary barriers to children having access to woodlands is distance, as travelling time and expense can undermine the benefits of the visit.

Planting trees in urban areas and on urban fringes makes visiting woods more accessible. Planting close to peoples homes also encourages them to use them more regularly and improves their understanding of this habitat. As such small areas of urban planting can be more valuable than large rural sites.

The Woodland Trust (in conjunction with the Forestry Commission) has set recommended access standards so that more people can benefit from woodland (fig 1).

## References

1. England Marketing (2009), Report to Natural England on childhood and nature: a survey on changing relationships with nature across generations.
2. Richer, J. (2005) Dirt is Good  
<http://www.smutsarbra.se/pressmaterial/Whitepaper.pdf>.
3. Murray, R. (2003). Forest School Evaluation Project: A Study in Wales. Report to the Forestry Commission
4. Space for People – Woodland Trust  
<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/about-us/publications/Documents/space-for-people-new.pdf>
5. Forestry Commission Scotland, March 2009, Forest School: Evidence for Restorative Health Benefits in Young People.
6. Bixler, R.D., Floyd, M.F., and Hammitt, W.E. (2002) "Environmental Socialization: Quantitative Tests of the Childhood Play Hypothesis." Environment and Behaviour, 34(6): 795-818

## Useful links

Forest Schools - <http://www.forestschools.com/>

